

spa business

uniting the world of spas

destination

day

resort

hotel

club

medical

thermal

curative





the way i see it

Judith Wendell, 56, founder, Sacred Currents, New York City, USA

I have a spiritual approach to life, but I don't like to think of myself as New Age. When I lived in San Francisco, there was a very liberal culture, with influences from China and Japan, and I went to a Zen monastery on Sundays to meditate and listen to talks. In NYC, I joined the School of Practical Philosophy, which has a distinct Hindu orientation. I also went to Bali with a Buddhist priest, visiting temples and learning more about myself and the faith. If I lost everything tomorrow, I hope these spiritual practices would guide me in a new direction.

I was born in New York City. Even though I grew up in the borough of Queens, culture – theatre, museums and music – were all part of my upbringing. My parents were great fans of theatre and still attend now, even in their 80s. I've lived in San Francisco and Connecticut, but have remained in NYC since 1987 because it has so much to offer. It is one of the more liberal areas in the US, so that has influenced my thinking. I spend my spare time with friends and family and I love to walk in Central Park all year round. I go to the theatre as often as possible and I'm especially fond of architecture: my home is right next to the Guggenheim Museum.

Feng shui was first practised by Chinese shamans 5,000 years ago in the belief that a harmonious flow of energy or 'chi' through an environment promotes health, happiness and prosperity. I'm a sceptical person, but when you experience results, scepticism falls away. My clients have got married when they wanted or gained more business. I can't take credit for it all, but perhaps I helped to set things up

I've had careers in jewellery and fashion accessory design. But I've always had a natural ability to understand spatial relationships. In 1995, I ran into the first three-year professional feng shui training programme and signed up immediately. It taught Black Hat Tibetan Buddhist (BTB) feng shui, which is based on how energy flows. But I've also learnt the Flying Star method, which employs compass directions and construction dates. After the courses, I left my high-paid job to set up my feng shui consultancy, Sacred Currents. It's the best decision I've ever made. I've reinvented myself a number of times, but I now feel that this is it: I have reached my true self.

Ideally, I like to get involved in site selection and architectural plans, but I can suggest furnishing and accessory layouts later on. I specialise in space clearing, which eliminates inauspicious energy, and blessing rituals. I find undesirable energy using dowsing rods and pendulums, and use resin smoke, mantras and bells to cleanse it. During a blessing, nine flower offerings are placed to honour the nine areas feng shui addresses: health, family, relationships, prosperity, career, knowledge, helpful people, creativity and reputation. Rice and pure alcohol are scattered too.

Winston Churchill said: "We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us." It's important for our environments to be healthy and balanced. Even a desk, for example, might have too many edges and subtly aggravate people who walk around it.

I've consulted on the Mandarin Oriental in New York, which has a beautiful pre- and post-treatment area overlooking the Hudson River. However, it's at the end of a hallway so the energy moves too quickly through it, thus is not relaxing. One suggestion I've made is to hang a large crystal to circulate the energy and create a more intimate atmosphere. I've also made some back-office adjustments, which have made a big difference to employees, and I'm working on enhancing aspects of its retail area.

I love what I do – working so intimately with people and making a difference to the quality of their lives. My future goal is to collaborate with more people who contribute to a healthy spa industry and planet.

The Dhara Dhevi Mandarin Oriental in Chiang Mai is a magnificent property: you are spa-ing the moment you enter. I love all massages, but for me it's about the energy the therapist puts in to it. It's obvious if they're really dedicated to it.

Fountains are often misunderstood. Moving water activates energy and can be beneficial for wealth if placed in an auspicious area, such as section eight on the Flying Star chart (which differs for each building). However, it's also important to look for hidden factors: a fountain could also dowse energy if placed in a fire area, which is associated with a spa's reputation.

I work with many businesses, including medical offices, restaurants and financial institutions in order to attract new clients, increase productivity, enhance company profiles and relieve employee stress. I'm just entering the spa industry, but it's a natural fit because feng shui is all about living healthfully. I've got spa prospects coming up in Las Vegas, Florida and Dubai and I may be working on something with the architect Bob Henry [see SB05/3 p48].

ABOUT JUDITH WENDELL

Judith Wendell set up her own jewellery company Spectrum Design in 1973, which she ran for five years. In 1978 she became involved in product development for US fashion accessory company Shuane Bazner Accessories and in 1999 started creating her own feng shui aromatherapy products, such as candles and travel pillows. She launched her feng shui advisory consultancy – Sacred Currents – in 1999. Her spa clients include the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group and New York-based firm Robert D Henry Architects.